

## **Bifurcating Patrick Wilson's Two Kinds of Power**

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Information seeking behavior is seminal in the work of library and information professionals because it is triggered by (1) a mental process that has some relation to (2) a contemporaneous mental process that is helping to drive an information seeking process. There must be a relation, other than temporal between the two mental processes, and we should use our best resources at capturing whatever that relation is.

### **1.**

**There must be complete bifurcation  
of Wilson's (1968) two kinds of power.**

Both indexing and searching ought to be done within the purview of either "descriptive" power (aboutness) or "exploitative" power (relevant to answering a question, or proving or disproving a hypothesis). I agree with Smiraglia (2007) that "Wilson's setting forth of the concept of exploitative power—the power of a scholar to make use of recorded knowledge—gave succeeding generations of researchers a means of measuring efficacy of systems for knowledge organization." However, the scholarly community has failed to meaningfully bifurcate Wilson's (1968) two kinds of power. (Smiraglia, 2007)

### **2.**

**There must be two kinds of relevance,  
one for each kind of power.**

A mere couching of the "concept of relevance" as the same bait for snagging either of two fish, where each kind of fish has a different appetite, misses Wilson's (1968) explanation of the not-so-obvious. (Wilson, 1968) I suppose you could call this the behavioral science of the fish (searcher), the search engine, and the fisherman (indexer). The form of indexing must match the form of searching. I suggest that each object be indexed twice, once so that it can be found descriptively and once again so it can be found exploitatively.

### **3.**

**Primary relevance and pseudo relevance**

"The American Society of Information Science and Technology [] In its citation to Wilson [in 2002] [] said Wilson's work showed that the items of 'primary relevance' in an information request are the inquirer's own personal concerns, preferences and stock of knowledge" rather than [pseudo relevance] an individual's specific request, the information available, or semantic or syntactic relationships." (Maclay, 2003) As Wilson (1968) rehashed the concept of the relevance in information retrieval and bibliographic control, he kept it in the context of exploitative- and descriptive control.

### **4.**

**The searcher's purpose in mind must be pigeon-holed,**

**as either exploitative or descriptive.  
This must jive with the indexer's purpose of mind.**

If “the term bibliographic control refers to the operations by which recorded information is organized or arranged according to established standards and thereby made readily retrievable,” (Chan as cited in Hjørland, 2006) then the standards must be followed so that the objects in the collection can be available and accessible. It is the standards that I question.

The concept of information overload subsumes the notion that a searcher has a **purpose of mind** and finds so much information beyond this purpose that he cannot trudge through it all, making what he wants—if it exists—essentially available while inaccessible. The worse scenario though is that the searcher's purpose of mind has not been indexed.

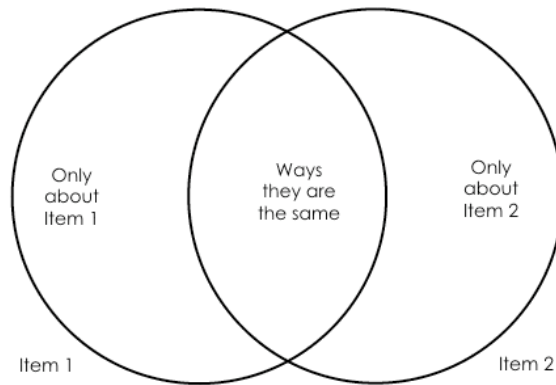
If the searcher's purpose of mind is not pigeon-holed at the indexing stage—either exploitatively or descriptively—the result may be “noise” or no useful metadata.

If bibliographic control is to yield “power over writings,” (Wilson, 1968) each form of bibliographic control (exploitative & descriptive) must match the searcher's information seeking behavior. If the searcher's behavior expressing his desire is purely of a descriptive nature, he would likely benefit more from bibliographic data that was indexed with a descriptive purpose of mind, and not with an exploitative purpose of mind.

**5.  
There remains an open question, whether descriptive  
control is completely subsumed by exploitative control.  
I suggest exploitative power is not all-subsuming.**

From reading what masters in this field have said about Wilson (1968), there appears to be an **open question** whether descriptive control is completely subsumed by exploitative control. I suggest that exploitative power is not all-subsuming, that they are independent concepts with some overlap.

The same object in the collection may be described bibliographically as though it were two objects. Actually it is two objects. It is one object for a searcher from an exploitative perspective. It is another object for another searcher from a descriptive perspective. It is probably of no consequence to either searcher that the other wanted the identical object for another purpose of mind.



Venn Diagram  
(Louisiana Voices, 2010)

It would be quite possible to hit both targets with the same shot. I submit that Wilson's two powers mandate bifurcation, as they are independent concepts:

Exploitative control: This "is about the conditions for the best possible utilization of the documents (to identify the best text to a given purpose)." (Hjørland, 2006)

Descriptive control: This "is about the pure descriptive recording of the documents." (Hjørland, 2006)

"There seem to me to be two quite distinct sorts of things that deserve to be called exercises of bibliographical control". (Wilson, 1968)

The effort of epistemology here is wasted if the **open question** is not adequately addressed early on. Otherwise, we are likely to have a well ordered repository that "has rather a stupefying and paralyzing [(signal-to-noise ratio)] than an encouraging effect." (Rosebery from 1877, as cited in Hjørland, 2006a) No matter how long Hjørland's (2006a) laundry list of "ways to limit large retrieval," we are putting the cart before the horse, if the above question is still open—or until we bifurcate. (Hjørland, 2006a, page 8) We ought to do one of two things; first, conclude that descriptive control is completely subsumed by exploitative control, or second, bifurcate at the indexing stage.

## 6.

### **Either cut bait or fish**

If exploitative power is not all-subsuming, and if (as I suggest) the searcher bifurcates at the searching stage, then bifurcating by the indexer would lead to more helpful indexing. We could argue about where the "burden of persuasion" lies, and about the "burden of going forward," and the "burden of proof." (Burden, n.d.) However, all intellectuals seem to have embraced Patrick Wilson's work. The question is likely answerable by intrinsic reasoning.

## 7.

### **Content neutrality**

"Pat Wilson was exceptional for his ability to bring his skills as a philosopher and a librarian to bear on complex issues, including the nature of bibliographical control, the insight that the relevance of documents is *situational*, and whether texts should [be] *believed*." (Buckland, as cited in Maclay, 2003) I believe "*situational*" in this context supports the notion of *bifurcation*.

Wilson (1968) couched his "revelation ratio" as *neutral and non-evaluating*. (Wilson, 1968) I do not understand why after over four decades there is so queasy a response for content neutrality and for aligning the indexer's purpose of mind (either exploitative or descriptive) with that of the searcher.

## 8.

### Null hypothesis

**Even if exploitative power is not all-subsuming of descriptive power, they do not have to be bifurcated to achieve content neutrality because there is no bias against the exploitatively minded searcher.**

As a source of authority to rebut this, I visited "Content Neutrality Law & Legal Definition" for some analogous guidance. I will treat the library as though it were "the government" below. (My numbering and bolding.)

Content neutrality refers generally to publications that are [1] without bias, representing all views fairly. In the context of free speech law, recent U.S. Supreme Court cases have based the outcome in some free speech cases largely on [2] whether the law restricting free speech was content based or content neutral. In cases involving a city's ordinance prohibiting nude dancing, a state university's requirement for mandatory student activity fees, and a state law restricting speech outside abortion clinics, among others, the Court found each to be content neutral. The Supreme Court has stated that the main question to ask in deciding content neutrality is [3] "whether the government has adopted a regulation because of a disagreement with the message it conveys. The government's purpose is the controlling consideration." Any law that regulates content must satisfy a strict scrutiny test that requires narrow tailoring to meet a compelling governmental interest." (Content neutrality, n.d.)

- [1] Failure to bifurcate in the indexing process produces unequal benefit. Indexing by one power (purpose of mind) handicaps a searcher pursuing the other, thus one searcher is disfavored.
- [2] The library has decided to index from what appears to be almost a completely descriptive perspective, and this is done based on the content of each object. The decision itself seems to be based on convenience, and not with any intent to harm one's ability to find documents. The result is skewed against any searcher whose purpose of mind is not the same as the indexer's. The bias against exploitatively minded searchers is based on a combination of (1) the content of the object indexed and (2) the indexer's methodology. Though the indexer did not intend to bias the exploitatively minded searcher, the indexer did chose to index by one power and not the other.

- [3] The library's adopted indexing rule is not based on any disagreement with the exploitative message that would emanate from an object, but the library has chosen to give much less than equal treatment to exploitative messages in the indexing process.
- [\*] This is not neutral and non-evaluating, An intentional evaluation of content has been made (albeit for convenience) so that descriptively minded searchers can be helped. This predicament is situational, as one type of searcher is better served than the other. Neither the exploitative-minded objects nor the exploitatively minded patrons are getting a fair shake.

I failed to rebut the null hypothesis, because the library has not adopted a regulation because of a disagreement with the message a document conveys. The library got off by the skin of its teeth, but I think I made my point.

### Summary

Information-seeking behavior is seminal in the work of library and information professionals because by observing it we stand a chance of understanding the patron's information-seeking process.

A patron has an information-seeking process with its underlying mental process. This mental process maps (partially) into another mental process that underlies the patron's information-seeking behavior. When the behavior results in a tidbit of information (pro or con with respect to the information-seeking process) the information-seeking process is updated, and the process is repeated. The patron repeats this algorithm many times. We can only observe his behavior.

We observe the behavior and try to extrapolate what we observe into the underlying mental process. From this we can try to extrapolate to the next mental process that underlies the information-seeking process. From this we can try to extrapolate to the information-seeking process. The only thing we can observe though is the searcher's behavior.

Relevancy is a situational phenomenon. So is credibility and the weight of the evidence. To assure that we capture this in the indexing process, we should bifurcate at this process because the searcher is certainly bifurcating at the searching process.

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